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RESERVE IN DECORATION.

I WAS reading Balzac, the other day, and this excerpt struck me as presenting a wider application and embodying a larger truth than the episodes of "Père Goriot" gave to it. It is the Duchesse de Langeais who says: "What happened to him (Goriot) as a father happens to the prettiest women in the world with the man she loves best. If her love wearies him, he will go elsewhere, and will treat her like a coward to get away. That is the upshot of all extravagant attachments. The heart is a treasury: empty it all at once, and you find yourself ruined. We think just as little of those who expend all their love as we do of a man who flings away his last penny. This father gave his all. For twenty years he had lavished his love, his life, on these two girls; his fortune he gave them in one day; the lemon was squeezed, and the daughters flung the rind into the gutter." This bit of Parisian philosophy, sounding, as it does, the keynote of the pitiful story of "Père Goriot," is based on a sentiment that is neither vicious nor untrue when we come to analyze it. Its derivative is the love of stability and strength. Our liking for people and things that are all on the surface is of brief duration. Our love of nature, and of the art that reflects or suggests nature, is inextinguishable. Nature is never emptied, exhausted, thrown out of poise; we always feel its staying qualities. So with any art that is founded so deep in nature that its revelations are only those of a larger force and meaning than were at first disclosed. A "finicky" picture, a smooth and jingling poem, a piece of dance music or "popular melody," the musical performance of a spiritless amateur, the ranting of a hack player—when we have seen or heard these once, we have seen and heard them for good. The lemon is squeezed, and we toss away the rind. We even gauge the tastes of our fellows by their proneness or indisposition to continue squeezing the lemon after the juice has been exhausted, and their readiness or unwillingness to pass on to the solids of art and life. We require a surface art in childhood, and formative stages of individual and national taste, in order that we may come to know the guise of art when it presents itself; but, its lineaments thus known, we demand to know its heart and mind. We outgrow Pope and Bloomfield, and take to Shelley and Emerson. The tea-store chromo suffices to feed our imagination no longer, and we resort to Turner, Wyant, Inness, and Moran. Auber and Offenbach give way before Wagner, and the tragedian who used to awaken our wonder by the length of his stride and the stridor of his elocution, bellows to the groundlings, while we sit spell-bound before the impressionism of an Irving, the subtleties of a Booth, or the statuesque strength of a McCullough. And the reason is vital: we brought up against the one phase of art, and stagnated there. The other let us into the open, where we could feed and grow. The one was limited; the other suggested the illimitable.

To concentrate the meaning of this artistic theorem on the subject in hand: The decoration of our homes and abiding places or resorts should have something of this freedom and largeness of

significance that we demand in the highest forms of sculpture, picture, building, poetry, music and the drama. We want some vanishing point in the immediate surroundings of our room. We do not wish to be the living center of a congregation of little hard facts that iterate their insignificance day after day, until mind and eye are weary of them. We do not want a carpet made of 150 separate and similar red and green bouquets. We don't want a quantity of tidies and furniture-covers to inflate themselves, and mutely appeal for notice, as we enter. We don't want Chinese bridges and pagodas all over the wall paper. We don't want a repetition of cast-iron looking frames for our pictures. We don't want the fire, with its cheery look and sound, closed up in a box. We don't want to glimpse the rule and yardstick, or to scent the shop—above all, the dry-goods shop—when we enter a room. We want latitude, repose, reserve. A room in which the denizen has set forth everything he has—each object cheapening the other, as in a fair—always suggests the stress of action that implies a process of exhaustion. To resort to

is rich and warm and cosey, or even possessed of domestic sumptuousness, where the mind rests when the imagination ranges, but I like to feel that every object in the place is not struggling to get itself into the highest light. If a picture hangs somewhat aloof, so that we do not see its subject at the first glance; if a screen, or drapery, or high-backed chair, or jutting chimney, throws a patch of gloom behind it; if, through glazed doors of a cabinet or book-case, I descry, but cannot particularize, the bric-à-brac or books; if, on the floor and before the doors, are rugs and portières that have soft patterns, rich textures and pleasing colors; if some few books, instead of being stacked up, inaccessible, on shelves, are allowed the run of the apartment; if the chairs are not set stiffly up against the wall, but maintain conversational attitudes; if the piano is open, and a fire is crackling on the hearth,—then the visitor, seated in such a room, does not find himself taking an inventory. The hostess may keep him waiting, the conversation may be dull; no matter: he is entertained, for he begins to penetrate the reserve,

and get at the meaning of the room. What is the subject of that picture? What is in the shadow? What are the treasures of the cabinet? What is the pattern and material of that portière? What have the family been reading? Who were last seated in those chairs? What was played on the piano? What dreams are indulged before the fire? The room, instead of being filled with furniture and textiles, becomes full of suggestions, of mystery. It holds deep intimations of life and thought that the mathematically arranged room is incapable of communicating. You can't imagine that anybody has thought anything worth while, or said anything worth while, in a country parlor, if you look into it and find the chairs drawn up in a funeral row against the walls, and see that every object is secured, so rigidly in place that nothing less than an earthquake or a prohibited small boy could impart to it anything of the ease that indicates habitability. One would sooner think of going to Lord & Taylor's to have fun, or meet in social converse, than to go into a place like that.

If our rooms reflect ourselves, they will not be exhausted at a glance. If we look beyond the present of time and place, we will have pictures on our walls that shall serve as windows through which the eye shall penetrate, and revel in congenial moods and phases of nature. We will have surroundings that shall be as thoughts rather than spoken words. We will not be put off with surface things, but repose in sense of reserved strength and sustentation.

CHARLES M. SKINNER.



ARABIAN MANUSCRIPT COVER.

Balzac's simile again, we feel that the lemon would not stand another squeeze. Here is no reserve. We know at a glance all that there is to know. We find all the master's tastes reflected at once, and feel as if he had little more to tell us.

I am no stickler for that excessive economy in decoration that may leave for our imagination verge enough, but that presents a room in comfortable and inhospitable aspect. I like a room that

and one or two pieces that could be used for panels. The Arabic lettering in itself is decorative, and the examples of it given in this manuscript cover are admirably adapted for such purposes. We saw, recently, thin brass plate cut with a saw after the geometrical design forming the center of this cover, the plate was set in the panel of a front door, faced by the sheet of glass, and made a very beautiful and effective decoration.

The accompanying illustration of an Arabian book-cover combines a number of decorative and useful patterns, several borders that are valuable,